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INCREASED U.S. MILITARY SALES TO CHINA: ARGUMENTS AND ALTERNATIVES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the current debate in the United States over proposals for increased U.S. military sales to China. The study first examines the background of U.S.-China security ties since the Nixon Administration, and then sets forth the parameters of the current debate by noting a number of issues concerning U.S. military transfers to China on which all sides generally agree. It shows that Americans familiar with the issue tend to identify with different groups of opinion or "schools of thought" on the question of U.S. military transfers to China, and provides a detailed pro-con analysis of the issue. It concludes by noting cross pressures that are likely to greet U.S. policy makers as they grapple with this issue in the months ahead and offers an assessment of four policy options of possible use by U.S. policymakers.

SUMMARY

The rapid development of U.S. relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) over the past few years has led to the establishment of normal Sino-American economic and political^{*} relations and a recent American willingness to sell some military support equipment and civilian technology with military applications to the PRC. Chinese leaders are pressing the United States to go further, notably to sell weapons and weapons-related technology to China. They are strongly supported by U.S. observers who judge that more U.S. military transfers to China are needed to meet current Chinese expectations that the U.S. will sell some weapons and weapons-related technology to China; to increase China's sense of security against the Soviet Union; and to consolidate U.S. political relations with China in anticipation of possible future Sino-American difficulties over Taiwan, U.S.-Soviet arms control and other matters.

American proponents of increased transfers stress the growing need for closer Sino-American cooperation in the face of what is seen as Soviet expansionism abroad. (A few of them judge that the U.S. should soon follow military sales with other forms of security cooperation, leading ultimately to the establishment of a mutual security arrangement between the U.S. and China.) They acknowledge that although U.S. friends and allies in Asia may be unsettled by the transfers, this

need not work completely to American disadvantage; it might actually increase U.S. leverage over some of those states, notably Japan. The proponents claim that Moscow views closer U.S.-PRC ties as inevitable and that the USSR is not likely to act rashly in dealing with either China or the United States. Limited U.S. transfers to China are said to present no major impediment to U.S.-Soviet cooperation in such important areas as arms control.

Recent trends in the triangular relationship among the United States, Soviet Union and China are seen by the proponents of increased Sino-American military sales as favoring their case. Pressure for sales to China is likely to build so long as U.S. relations with the Soviet Union remain more hostile than cooperative, U.S. relations with China build toward greater friendship, and Sino-Soviet relations remain stalemated. The Chinese leaders are also likely to continue to press for U.S. military supplies.

Increased military sales to China are strongly opposed by other U.S. observers. Some believe that negotiations with Moscow are a better way to deal with Soviet power than closer strategic alignment with China. Others see problems stemming from possible leadership instability in China or excessive Chinese expectations of, or dependence on, U.S. support; or they voice concern over the rise in Chinese influence and decline in U.S. influence in Asia that is expected to follow U.S. arms sales to China, stressing that China might use its new influence to bully its smaller neighbors, especially Taiwan.

In reaction to the U.S. sales, the Soviet Union might increase military pressure throughout China's periphery--a development that would likely affect negatively U.S. interests as tensions rose in Asia. Japan might feel compelled to adopt a more independent foreign policy that would not necessarily be in U.S. interests. U.S.-Soviet relations could clearly be affected, as the sales to China could lock the United States into a stridently anti-Soviet policy that would preclude progress in arms control negotiations or other important matters.

The arguments of those opposed to the U.S. sales to China suggest that U.S. policy makers will be taking certain--possibly grave--risks if they decide to go ahead with more sales. In the absence of a clear definition of American objectives in developing security relations with China, such ties could well be misinterpreted by Chinese, Soviet, Japanese, Taiwanese or other interested leaders abroad, as well as by opinion leaders in the United States. Friends and foes alike could see the ties as affecting their interests in the extreme--misinterpretations that could lead to reactions with potentially negative consequences for the United States.

If the Reagan Administration does decide to proceed with military sales to China, the likelihood of misinterpretation of that action could be substantially reduced if the United States took the current opportunity to define publicly a set of limited goals for American-China security ties that could command support at home, consolidate relations with China and still reassure U.S. friends and foes in Asia. This would necessitate a change in the American practice during the past decade when U.S. policy makers kept their approaches to Sino-American security ties shrouded behind a veil of ambiguity and secrecy.

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INCREASED U.S. MILITARY SALES TO CHINA: ARGUMENTS AND ALTERNATIVES

I. INTRODUCTION

Sino-American relations reached a new stage in late 1980 as contending groups within and outside the U.S. Government began actively to debate in public and private whether or not the United States should take what is widely seen as the next step forward in developing Sino-American friendship: the sale of weapons and weapons-related technology to China. The issue of whether or not to proceed with such sales is not only of military significance but has broader political importance as well. It has direct impact on a central question in U.S. foreign policy--how far should the United States go in trying to move closer to China in order to improve the American international position against the USSR. Opinion has ranged widely. Some judge that the United States has already gone too far in military ties with China and should stop promptly. Others generally are satisfied with the current policy but firmly resist further development, at least for the foreseeable future. Still others favor a gradual increase in such transfers to China as an important step leading to the formation of a Sino-American mutual security arrangement against the Soviet Union.

Congressional interest in this debate has been strong because present law, notably the Arms Export Control Act, would make the sales of arms

and other military equipment to China subject to several restrictions directly involving the Congress. 1/ Interest in the debate has been increased by the election of a Republican Administration that receives divided counsel on the issue of military transfers to China; and by recent international developments--notably the heightened Soviet military pressure on Poland, which has prompted press speculation that the U.S. would strengthen

1/ Section 36(b) of the Arms Export Control Act (AECA) allows the Congress to disapprove by concurrent resolution the transfer of any "major defense equipment" worth \$7 million or more, or any other defense articles or services worth \$25 million or more. Sections 38(b)(3) and 36(c) of the AECA regarding commercial transactions allow the Congress to disapprove by concurrent resolution transfers of "major defense equipment" valued at \$100 million or more. Also regarding commercial transactions, under a new provision in P.L. 96-533, Section 38(a)(3) was created and gives the President discretionary authority to require that any defense article or service be subject to government-to-government sales restrictions such as those noted in section 36(b) above.

At the same time, the Foreign Assistance Act, Section 620(f), would appear to limit the furnishing of U.S. grant military assistance to any Communist country unless the President issues a narrowly defined waiver. This section specifies that the President must determine and report to Congress that: such assistance is vital to U.S. security; the recipient country is not controlled by the international communist conspiracy; and such assistance will further promote the independence of the recipient country from international communism. The phrase "Communist country" expressly includes the P.R.C.

Section 505(b) of the Act limits the ability of the President to grant defense articles at a cost in excess of \$3 million in any fiscal year in the absence of a waiver by him. According to this section, the President must determine that the recipient country conforms to the principles of the U.N. Charter, that the articles transferred will be used to defend the country or the free world; that the recipient country is making reasonable efforts to build up its own defense, and that the increased ability of the recipient country to defend itself is important to the security of the United States.

Regarding the possible sending of military advisors to China, Section 515 of the Foreign Assistance Act states that no military assistance advisory group, military mission, or other organization of U.S. military personnel performing similar military advisory functions under the Act or the Arms Export Control Act may operate in a foreign country like China unless specifically authorized by Congress.

military ties with China if Soviet forces took military action against the Polish regime or its labor unions. 2/

This study examines the current debate in the United States over proposals for increased U.S. military sales to China. Based on journal articles, press reports and other public pronouncements, as well as on interviews with over 30 U.S. foreign policy and defense specialists both in and out of government who have been closely involved in this issue, the study first examines, in Section II, the background of U.S.-China security ties since the Nixon administration. Section III sets forth the parameters of the current debate by noting a number of issues concerning U.S. military transfers to China on which all sides generally agree. The consensus seen on these issues is shown to be particularly useful because it serves to narrow substantially the scope of the debate and reduces the number and the complexity of the pros and cons that must be considered by U.S. policy makers.

The study shows in Section IV that Americans familiar with the issue tend to identify with different groups of opinion or "schools of thought" on the question of U.S. military transfers to China. They do so largely on the basis of their differing strategic assumptions in regard to the U.S.-Soviet balance and China's current and potential role in that equation. The section describes the schools of thought and gives examples of individual analysts identified with each group.

Section V provides a detailed pro-con analysis of the issue while Section VI projects cross pressures that are likely to greet U.S. policy

2/ See press reports on Sen. Stevens visit to China seen in the Washington Post, January 5, 1981.

makers as they grapple with this issue in the months ahead and offers an assessment of four policy options of possible use by U.S. policymakers. The summary, which appears at the front of the study, contains the major findings of the paper. 3/

A basic ingredient in the current debate involves China's military strength and capabilities, especially vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. 4/ Those unfamiliar with this subject may wish to consult the appendix.

3/ For selected readings on the issue of U.S.-China military cooperation, see the last section of this study. As to the interviews with U.S. specialists, the intent was to elicit the viewpoints of these individuals in as frank a manner as possible. Given the institutional sensitivity that surrounds this issue, individuals with whom the author spoke were assured that their comments would not be for attribution.

The author also received support and important insights from several of his colleagues at the Library of Congress including John Collins, Richard Cronin, Ron Dolan, Francis Miko, Larry Niksch, Tommy Whitton, and Robert Worden, as well as from David Raddock, an international affairs specialist with the Enserch Corporation, Washington, D.C. Carolyn Colbert of the Congressional Research Service was responsible for preparing the study for publication.

4/ In particular, measuring the need for U.S. military transfers to China frequently depends on one's assessment of China's military strength vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. For instance, a few observers, who admit to being somewhat unfamiliar with China's military capabilities, have feared that China is so weak vis-a-vis the Soviet Union that it will soon succumb to Soviet pressure unless the U.S. quickly transfers military supplies to the PRC.

II. BACKGROUND

Although debate over U.S.-China military ties has only recently received prominent public attention, the roots of this debate go back to the Nixon administration, when the pros and cons of seeking U.S.-China security cooperation were considered prior to significant U.S. initiatives toward the PRC. These initiatives included the Nixon administration's decisions to sell China a sophisticated ground station designed to pick up and transmit television signals via satellite, and several Boeing 707 aircraft with attendant aeronautical technology; and the Ford Administration's approval of the sale to China of British Rolls Royce "Spey" aircraft engines and related technology for China's fighter aircraft program, and its approval of the sale to China of an American computer that had potential military applications. Evidence of a growing U.S.-China security relationship was also seen in frequent joint consultations of Chinese and American officials on global and regional military issues, arms control and other security matters, and in repeated American claims that it would strongly oppose any Soviet effort to dominate or establish "hegemony" over China.

The Carter administration continued this primarily symbolic interchange during visits of Secretary Vance and Dr. Brzezinski to China in August 1977 and May 1978, respectively. The Administration took other steps that incrementally increased Sino-American security ties. For example, not only did American leaders repeatedly voice support for Chinese security against Soviet "hegemony," but they began in 1978 to stress American backing for a "strong" as well as for a "secure" China.

American warships called on Hong Kong, which Peking regards as part of China, and received Chinese communist officials for well-publicized visits. The United States also adopted a more liberal attitude toward the transfer of sophisticated technology to China, for instance allowing China to purchase special U.S. geological survey equipment and nuclear power plant technology. Of more importance, the United States announced in November 1978 a shift from its past policy of opposition to Western arms transfers to the Sino-Soviet powers. It indicated that the United States would no longer oppose the sale of military weapons to China by West European countries. 5/

The strategic importance of Sino-American ties was underlined by Defense Secretary Harold Brown during a visit to China in January 1980--one month after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Headlines reporting on that visit and subsequent high-level interchange between military leaders of China and the United States spoke boldly of an emerging Sino-American "alliance" focused against the USSR. Indeed, the rapid decline in Soviet-American relations at the end of 1979 and the increasingly strong perception in the United States of a growing Soviet military threat seemed to give impetus to American interest in closer ties with China, including security ties. Chinese leaders, for their part, stressed repeatedly their

5/ For more information, see U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. United States-Chinese-Soviet Relations. Issue Brief No. IB79115, by Robert G. Sutter (periodically updated). Washington, 1980. 20p.

desire to develop a "longterm, strategic" relationship with the United States, adding on occasion their strong interest in obtaining weapons and other military equipment from the United States.

Following Secretary Brown's visit to China, the United States announced that it was willing to consider sales to China of selected military items and technologies with military support applications. In March 1980, the Administration listed categories of military support equipment the United States would consider, on a case-by-case basis, for export to China (Munitions Control Newsletter No. 81). Included on the list were radar, communications and training equipment, trucks, transportation aircraft and unarmed helicopters. The State Department announced that it would consider each export license application individually, bearing in mind the level of technology involved and the items' intended use.

Secretary Brown announced in mid-1980 that the U.S. Government had approved requests from several American firms to make sales presentations to the Chinese for certain articles of military support equipment and dual-use technology (items primarily of civilian use but with possible military applications). By late 1980 it was reported that several hundred such requests had been approved. Carter administration spokesmen defined the limits of such U.S. military cooperation with China in noting that "the United States and China seek neither a military alliance nor any joint defense planning" and that "the United States does not sell weapons to China." But they repeatedly

implied that this policy could be subject to further change, especially if either or both countries faced "frontal assaults" on their common interests, presumably from the USSR or its proxies. 6/

Although subject to differing interpretations, the Carter administration spokesmen's statements on the limits of the U.S.-China security relationship represented a departure from the past practice of the Administration and its two Republican predecessors: avoiding public explanations of the extent of Sino-American security relations or their possible implications, and leaving the policy ambiguous. This approach was thought by some analysts to be a useful way to increase the impact of the developing Sino-American ties on the Soviet Union; it presumably would prompt the USSR to be more forthcoming and accommodating in its relations with the United States, in order to discourage Washington from developing even closer security ties with China. 7/ The ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding this aspect of American policy toward China was increased with the election of a new U.S. administration in November 1980 which has yet to articulate a position on the sensitive issue of military transfers to China.

6/ For additional information, see U.S. Department of State. GIST. U.S.-China Security Relationship. Washington, July 1980.

7/ Others, however, saw the ambiguity surrounding U.S.-China relations as designed to hide the absence of a well coordinated U.S. policy toward China that could be explained clearly and could receive the full support of the American people and their representatives in Congress.

III. PARAMETERS OF THE DEBATE

The recent debate between proponents and opponents of increased U.S. military transfers to China ranges across a broad spectrum of foreign policy issues, but an analysis of the literature and interviews with U.S. specialists reveals a number of common themes and points of agreement. The consensus on these issues substantially narrows the scope of the debate, and in effect, provides a framework for it. 8/

This section notes the major points of agreement that have emerged in the debate. The points are discussed in subsections dealing with China, the Soviet Union and the United States. It then shows how consensus on these issues serves to narrow the scope of the debate, and reduces the number and complexity of the pros and cons regarding increased U.S. military transfers to China that must be considered by U.S. policy makers and other interested observers.

A. Points of Agreement in the Debate

1. Chinese Capabilities and Intentions

There is general agreement among U.S. specialists that China does not face an immediate crisis in its current military confrontation with

8/ Thus, for instance, the public warnings against U.S. military sales to China have sometimes been particularly shrill and unrealistic, with some commentaries warning of the dire consequences of a major American effort to "rearm" China. As seen below, even advocates of closer U.S. military ties with China see currently insurmountable impediments to such an effort on both the U.S. and Chinese sides, thereby effectively eliminating that as a realistic consideration in the current debate.

the USSR. As seen in the appendix, the Chinese seem capable of resisting--albeit at great cost--a major Soviet conventional attack. And a Soviet nuclear attack against China is made less attractive because of the danger of a Chinese nuclear counterstrike against Soviet Asia. China is seen as clearly the weaker party militarily along the Sino-Soviet border, and its military capabilities are likely to decline relative to those of the USSR if current trends continue.

While there is some disagreement on whether or not China has firmly decided on what kinds of weapons or other military equipment it would like to obtain from the United States, 9/ it seems clear that current Chinese interest is quite selective. China has focused on obtaining the capability to produce such sophisticated equipment as fighter aircraft engines and radars, air-to-air missiles, and anti-tank missiles. 10/ This accords with

9/ In this regard, several military specialists have pointed to the seeming inconsistency in Peking's defense procurement process, noting in particular the on-again, off-again Chinese interest in the British "Harrier" aircraft. China also was reported very interested in French anti-tank missiles, but agreements on this item have not been reached. The reasons given for this seeming Chinese inconsistency vary: Some point to China's recently heightened awareness of its inability to pay for foreign equipment. Others note the reluctance of some western countries to offend the USSR by being one of the first Western powers to sell weapons to China. Still others emphasize that Western countries are unwilling to supply China with sophisticated military equipment that they judge would be of little practical use for China given the current, relatively low technical competence in the PRC.

10/ Chinese leaders are seen as pressing the United States to permit such military transfers, both to enhance China's military power against the USSR and to demonstrate America's growing commitment to China's defense. Thus, for example, Su Yu, a senior Chinese military leader, told the Japanese press in March 1980 that America's willingness to move ahead with sales of military equipment to China was seen by the Chinese as a key indication of the U.S. commitment to work with China in a common front against the Soviet Union. Vice Premier Geng Biao and Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Wenjin both subsequently told the Western news media that they anticipate that the United States will sell arms to China in the future. Recent evidence of this view was seen in the Washington Post, November 23, 1980.

the views of many Western analysts who stress China's need for all-weather fighter aircraft, greater defensive capabilities against Soviet armor, and greater ability to provide air cover in nearby waters.

There is general agreement among U.S. specialists that PRC military forces are designed and deployed for the defense of China and are not well suited or positioned to project power far from China's borders. This does not mean that analysts agree that China would not use its existing forces to attack nearby areas. Indeed, some analysts judge that prospects for a new Chinese attack against Vietnam remain high, and other analysts remain quite skeptical of PRC claims of "peaceful" intentions toward Taiwan.

There are also serious limits seen in Peking's ability to pay for and utilize large amounts of sophisticated weapons and weapons-related technology. China's current economic program actually calls for a cut in the defense budget, and it promises to give defense modernization the lowest priority among the four modernizations pursued by the present leadership. 11/ China's difficulties in using the relatively sophisticated aircraft engine technology of the Soviet MiG-21 and the Rolls Royce "Spey" engine are seen as symptomatic of a broader PRC technical weakness which was severely exacerbated by the disruption of Chinese higher education and research during 1966-1976.

11/ While there was some public debate in China during 1977 and 1978 over how much of China's resources would be devoted to modernizing the defense establishment, the trend since then has been to give defense modernization a low priority. See the discussion of this issue in the Appendix, p. 51.

2. Soviet Objectives

Analysts seem to agree generally that the Soviet Union will remain insecure about its position in the Far East for some time to come. Even if China should alter its current foreign policy and move toward a more even-handed posture between the United States and USSR, Soviet planners are viewed as likely to remain distrustful of China and intent on maintaining Soviet military power in the region to protect against possible Chinese incursions. Military power is one of the few reliable sources of influence Moscow can bring to bear to protect its interests against a China that is growing in economic and military power and consolidating relations with the other two major powers in the region, Japan and the United States. One of the major Soviet objectives 12/ in the region apparently is the protection and development of eastern Siberia, which USSR planners reportedly view as an important element in the future economic development of the USSR. A substantial Sino-Soviet reconciliation that would allow the USSR to lower its guard against China is seen as only a very remote possibility for the foreseeable future.

Moscow's obvious desire to slow or halt the development of Sino-American military ties is commonly perceived as motivated by concern

12/ As noted in Section IV below, there is considerable debate among analysts about Soviet military intentions abroad, including in Asia. Some analysts see the USSR as basically reactive and defensive, whereas others see it as expansionistic, and as seeking military superiority and dominance. The point here is merely to show that the analysts generally agree that, whatever the motives of the USSR, it will continue to see a need for strong military power against China in Asia for some time to come.

over growing Chinese power and worry about a possibly emerging U.S.-backed global system, including China as well as the NATO countries and Japan, which would be directed against the USSR. It is thus repeatedly emphasized that Moscow will likely view U.S.-China military ties not solely in the context of their impact on the Sino-Soviet military balance in Asia, but it will weigh their significance in the broader context of overall American policy toward the Soviet Union.

3. U.S. Interests and Objectives

While the United States is seen as favoring a secure and independent China, a radical change in China's current defense policy toward a large scale military build up of Chinese forces is widely viewed as contrary to U.S. interests. Such a move would upset the Chinese economic modernization program and perhaps would lead to political instability in China. It would upset the regional balance of power in East Asia in ways probably adverse to American interests.

Most U.S. specialists agree that the United States would not likely offer free military assistance to China under foreseeable circumstances. They accept the view that current Chinese economic and technical weaknesses preclude large scale U.S. military transfers that would fundamentally affect China's power projection capabilities over the near term. ^{13/} As a result

^{13/} Phrases like "near term" and "foreseeable circumstances" are general terms that offer only a limited degree of precision. The intention here is to note that barring some major change in the international order, China, as a result of U.S. military transfers, is unlikely to pose a much more serious military threat than it does now, at least until the latter part of the decade.

attention has focused on the political and symbolic repercussions of U.S-China military ties. Ostentatious displays of U.S. military cooperation with China--if not backed by substance--are said to risk misinterpretation at home and abroad and should be avoided in favor or more quiet interchange. Under ideal conditions, it would be desirable to allow Sino-U.S. relations to mature for a few more years before moving into the symbolically important area of military transfers.

A common recommendation in this regard is for more clear articulation and management of U.S. policy toward China. ^{14/} Several China specialists have noted, for instance, that Chinese leaders seem to interpret past American behavior as indicating that the United States would soon be willing to transfer significant military equipment to China, including arms. They have added that the United States should avoid giving such impressions unless it has the intention--and the political support at home--to follow through with the military sales. It is imperative, in their view, that the United States be able at some point "draw the line" with the Chinese, and thereby refuse growing Chinese pressure for military transfers without giving the Chinese the impression of a substantial decline in U.S. interest in close ties with the PRC.

It is also widely held that increased U.S. military transfers to China would probably to some extent reduce U.S. influence and enhance Chinese influence elsewhere in Asia. They would prompt uncertainty among long-standing U.S. friends and allies in Asia, with the possible exceptions

^{14/} Indeed, several analysts claimed that the U.S. leaders have not even defined what role the U.S. would like to see China play in future global and regional development, and therefore find it difficult to determine how U.S. military transfers would help or hinder China playing that role.

of Pakistan and Thailand, which might welcome such ties. They would deepen the suspicions of India, Taiwan, and Vietnam toward the United States and would seriously reduce the prospect of a more cooperative U.S.-Soviet relationship. (In light of recent U.S.-Soviet differences over bilateral issues, arms control, Poland and competition in the Third World, such a relationship is generally thought to be a remote prospect at the present time.)

B. Implications for Current Policy

These commonly held views suggest a narrower range of dispute in the debate than appears at first glance and may make it easier for policy makers and other observers to assess realistically the pros and cons of U.S.-China military ties. For one thing, they indicate that the United States need not rush military transfers to China in order to help China against military threat from the USSR. And, the United States need not worry excessively about a possible breakthrough in Sino-Soviet relations that would substantially reduce Soviet military preoccupation with China in Asia.

Also, China is likely to be quite selective in what it agrees to buy from the United States; and whatever the United States provides, it will probably take many years before it markedly increases China's power against its main adversary or increases China's ability to project power far beyond its borders.

The currently main importance of U.S. transfers to China is a political or symbolic one. The transfers will clearly have an upsetting--though not necessarily adverse--effect on U.S. relations with other Asian states and the Soviet Union. Moscow will view such transfers not only in the

context of its competition with China but also with an eye toward broad U.S. intentions toward the USSR. Managing such a symbolically important and consequential relationship with China is widely seen as requiring a more clearly defined perception of American interests in China that will avoid serious misinterpretation of American intentions at home and abroad.

IV. DIFFERING STRATEGIC ASSUMPTIONS AND CONTENDING SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Before reviewing, in Section V, the current pros and cons of increased U.S. military transfers to China, this section explains why specialists have adopted different opinions and sided with different schools of thought on this question. It shows that their conflicting views have depended heavily on their diverging assessments of an underlining broader strategic question in U.S. foreign policy--how far should the United States go in trying to improve relations with China in order to strengthen the American international position against the Soviet Union? In particular, analysts who are deeply concerned with U.S. military weakness vis-a-vis the Soviet Union and who view China as strongly opposed to the USSR and favorable to the U.S. tend to support increased U.S. military transfers to China. In contrast, analysts who are sanguine about U.S. power vis-a-vis the Soviet Union or who are skeptical of China's reliability or strength tend to oppose such sales.

The section first examines the major differing views on America's position in its rivalry with the Soviet Union and on China's possible role in support of the United States. It then shows how these differing views--as well as some other more specialized concerns in U.S. foreign policy--have led analysts to align with one or another of the contending schools of thought that have begun to emerge on the question of U.S. military sales to China.

A. Differing Strategic Assumptions

1. Soviet Expansion and Its Challenge to the United States

There is a large body of opinion in the United States that sees the Soviet Union as an expansionist power that seeks military, economic and political preeminence in the world. (Some specialists add that the USSR is also anxious to project world revolution abroad in order to gain world ideological preeminence.) The Soviets are viewed as seeking to establish overall international superiority over the United States and are seen as on the ascendency in this effort. Current trends are viewed on balance as favoring Soviet ambitions, as present uncertainties and elements of instability in the world are believed to offer the USSR fertile grounds for exploitation. Although Soviet interests have suffered certain setbacks, Soviet leaders have not been diverted from their ultimate objectives by momentary setbacks; they take a patient, long term view of history, their confidence bolstered by a sense of destiny.

Another group emphasizes that even though Soviet leaders may strive for superiority and preeminence, circumstances unfavorable to the USSR have profoundly affected their aspirations. Spokesmen of this group see the balance of world developments as frequently counter to Soviet designs. Domestic and international factors are perceived as limiting Soviet freedom to pursue their objectives. Soviet leaders are said to be aware of the fact that their ideological goals are presently unattainable and they are finding it necessary to adjust their policies to current realities. While the Soviet Union might strive to achieve superiority over the United States, it is seen as having great difficulty in doing so. In short, the Soviet Union today qualifies only militarily as a superpower.

A third group believes that the Soviet Union is far less expansionistic than in the past and that Soviet policies are being shaped primarily by the country's requirements of internal social and economic development and a historic sense of insecurity. A more confident and secure Soviet leadership, according to this view, would be ready to act as a responsible participant in an increasingly interdependent world. Soviet military efforts are seen by this group as an unwanted drain on resources based on the Soviet view (perhaps misguided) of what is needed to maintain security. Since Soviet leaders understand that they are best served by international stability, their fundamental interests are reconcilable with those of the United States.

Analysts who take this more benign view of Soviet policies and goals caution against looking at international developments in terms of superpower winners and losers. They judge that it is shortsighted automatically to equate Soviet setbacks with Western gains and vice-versa. They stress that there are shared interests, dangers and responsibilities between the superpowers in a number of areas. They advocate American policy aimed at increasing the Soviet stake in international stability and providing the Soviet Union with incentives for continued cooperation with the West.

2. U.S. Ability to Deal With Soviet Power

Closely related to the differing views of Soviet power and intentions are diverging assessments of U.S. ability to deal with that power. On one side are those who see American abilities as somewhat less than in the past, when the United States enjoyed dominant military, economic and political

influence in world affairs, but nonetheless still quite adequate to handle emerging Soviet power.

Others stress that U.S. power--especially military power--has declined steadily to a point where the USSR now enjoys basic superiority over the United States in both conventional and strategic weapons. They are generally optimistic, however, that the United States has begun to redress the military balance and will be able to catch up with the Soviet Union and close the so-called "window of vulnerability" by the end of the decade. ^{15/}

Still others are more pessimistic about U.S. military capabilities, which they see as likely to decline further relative to the Soviet Union, short of a major shock in American foreign policy. It is sometimes noted that even though U.S. military capabilities may decline, the United States still has many more capable allies than does the USSR; U.S. allies presumably can assist in checking Soviet expansion. However, several military planners have stressed that the allies have been slow and halting in their efforts to redress what is seen as an emerging East-West disequilibrium. They perceive, for instance, a weakened allied posture in Northeast Asia. They judge that the balance there has become more disadvantageous as U.S.

^{15/} They sometimes add that projected Soviet economic and other internal difficulties by the end of the decade will restrict Moscow's ability to expand its military power as in the past and will thereby enhance America's ability to close the power gap.

Technically speaking, the term "window of vulnerability" refers to the period when U.S. land-based ICBM's will be vulnerable to Soviet attack--a period that is supposed to end with the deployment of the new MX missile. However, the term is sometimes used more broadly to refer to what is seen as a general superpower imbalance, against the United States.

forces have been drawn down as a result of the end of the Vietnam War and the diversion of forces to the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean, and as the Soviet Union has continued to build steadily its air, naval and ground forces in the area. They add that Japan--the largest and most capable U.S. ally in Asia--has helped inadequately to redress the balance over the past several years. 16/

3. China's Utility in U.S. Competition With the USSR

China plays an important and helpful role in U.S. global and regional strategic planning, especially vis-a-vis the USSR, according to many analysts. Most agree that China currently assists the United States by tying down Soviet troops and resources that otherwise might be focused against the West in Europe or the Middle East. This complicates Soviet defensive strategy, notably by raising uncertainty in the USSR about the

16/ Some analysts offer similarly alarming views of the decline of the allied position in the face of Soviet or Soviet-backed expansionism in Southeast Asia, and they argue strongly for closer relations with China as a means to sustain a favorable equilibrium. As in the case of Northeast Asia, these analysts see it as fundamentally important that the U.S. increase military transfers to China, not so much because they will increase Chinese power against the USSR, but because they will consolidate U.S. relations with the PRC and thereby increase prospects that China will side with the United States in the event of East-West confrontation in Northeast or Southeast Asia.

In contrast, some other military planners are less concerned by the changing military balance in East Asia. They tend to emphasize Soviet logistical problems and other sources of military vulnerability as well as Moscow's political isolation. In particular, Moscow has made few gains in expanding its influence as the United States has pulled back its forces, and the two major regional powers -- China and Japan -- continue to work against Soviet interests in the region.

security of the Soviet Asian front should conflict break out farther west. 17/

But within this context, there are wide ranging views of China's utility in helping the United States in its competition with the Soviet Union. Some hold that China is a relatively weak source of leverage against the USSR, noting that China is so much weaker than the USSR that it would be unlikely to cause serious concern for Moscow in the event of East-West conflict elsewhere. 18/

Others see China as sufficiently strong militarily and reliable politically that it represents a useful partner for the United States in efforts to curb Soviet expansionism. Still others stress that while China may be effective against the USSR today, the growing disequilibrium between Chinese and Soviet forces along the border over the longer term could cause China to reconsider its anti-Soviet posture and reach an accommodation with Moscow contrary to American interests.

17/ Soviet military planners are thought to assess China's limited military capabilities much more realistically than the shrill Soviet media commentaries which warn of the China "threat." Nevertheless, Soviet logistical problems and other weakness in Asia as well as their assessment of the probable cost of any protracted conflict with China are thought to promote general Soviet concern about the Asian front.

18/ A few in this group hold that China's commitment to an anti-Soviet foreign policy is less strong than it appears, emphasizing that China would likely arrange a modus vivendi with the USSR rather than risk being drawn into a U.S.-Soviet confrontation. They sometimes add that the likelihood of such Chinese behavior may have become somewhat greater in recent months as a result of reported Chinese irritation with the Reagan Administration's avowed policy of improved relations with Taiwan.

B. Contending Schools of Thought

Largely depending on how they assess the Soviet-American rivalry and China's potential role in that rivalry, analysts tend to identify with several discernable groups of opinion or schools of thought ^{19/} that have begun to emerge in the past few months. Observers in these groups have naturally been inclined to give more stress to some issues, while softpedaling others. They have predictably done so with an eye toward safeguarding aspects of U.S. foreign policy of particular importance to them.

Thus, for example, many U.S. military planners have shown particular concern with what they have seen as the relative decline of U.S. military power vis-a-vis the Soviet Union in recent years. Dissatisfied with allied efforts to help redress the balance, many planners view U.S. military cooperation with China as a useful source of leverage that could help to remedy that decline. ^{20/} In contrast, Americans interested

^{19/} These schools of thought are by no means clearly defined groups, with uniform points of view. Rather, they represent only the beginnings of the development of focal points in the growing debate on U.S.-China military ties.

^{20/} This point of view was voiced by a number of U.S. military analysts who were interviewed, although they acknowledged that public attention to their approach has been sparse. For a classic example of this point of view, see the articles by Michael Pillsbury cited at the end of this study.

It should be added that these military planners tend to stress that even though PRC military capabilities are not expected to increase rapidly as a result of increased U.S. military transfers to China, closer U.S.-China security ties are beneficial to the United States. They would help ensure that China would remain on the U.S. side in the event of a major East-West confrontation and would increase Soviet worry about China taking action against the USSR in conjunction with U.S. actions against the Soviet Union.

in arms control with the USSR frequently are concerned with restoring enough trust in U.S.-Soviet relations to facilitate conclusion of important agreements on SALT, MBFR and nuclear arms control in Europe. They see U.S. military moves toward China as contrary to this objective and as of marginal utility to the United States when compared to the importance of major U.S.-Soviet arms accords. 21/

Soviet specialists are divided into two general groups on this issue. Some see Sino-American military cooperation as contrary to what they judge should be the primary U.S. goal of establishing an international order based chiefly on a Soviet-American modus vivendi. 22/ Many others, however, see the USSR as a newly emerging great power and believe that the United States should work closely with other sources of world power--including China--in order to preclude more Soviet expansion and encourage the USSR to adjust to and cooperate with the status quo. They see U.S. military cooperation with China as useful in this context. 23/

21/ Former U.S. Ambassador to Moscow, Malcolm Toon, voiced this view in testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on August 26, 1980.

22/ See in particular, the testimony of Raymond Garthoff of the Brookings Institution before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on August 26, 1980. Marshall Shulman has also been a strong proponent of this point of view.

23/ Harvard University Professor Richard Pipes has been outspoken in this regard.

China specialists are also divided. Many are concerned with the negative impact a U.S. refusal to transfer military supplies would have on Sino-American bilateral relations. 24/ But many other Chinese specialists worry about potential negative consequences of closer military cooperation with China for future Sino-American relations. 25/

Of course, not all views of U.S. arms transfers to China are governed by the Soviet-U.S.-Chinese triangular relationship. Thus, for example, many Asian specialists have reflected the uneasiness of the countries of

24/ Several judge that the United States might seriously disappoint the Chinese leaders by not following through with military supplies, after having given the Chinese the impression during visits and other interchanges that such equipment would be forthcoming. Some of them add that the supply of limited amounts of weapons and weapons-related technology represents an effective way to consolidate relations with the Chinese leadership. Amicable Sino-American relations are seen as a most useful means to stabilize the situation in Asia in the face of possible internal and external challenges, including possible Soviet expansion.

While this view has been held by several important China analysts in the U.S. Government in recent years, it has not been subject to much media attention. For a variation on this view, see Roger Brown's article listed in the last section of this study.

25/ Some worry about leadership instability in China or voice concern over Chinese intentions toward their neighbors. U.S. military ties might identify the United States too closely with only one group in the Chinese leadership--a group whose tenure may be limited and whose successors may not be favorably disposed to the United States.

Some analysts, who have been critical of recent developments in China, have been associated with this view. See in particular Ray Cline's analysis of the "China Card" in the Washington Star, October 14, 1980.

Other China specialists stress that the Chinese may come to rely too much on the United States, or may find U.S. military equipment inappropriate for China's military modernization--developments possibly leading to a severe downturn in U.S.-Chinese relations in the future. A. Doak Barnett and Allen Whiting voiced these kinds of reservations in testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on July 22, 1980.

the region over U.S.-China military cooperation. 26/ Specialists with particular interest in Taiwan have an obvious strong interest in blocking military ties with China. Meanwhile, Americans interested in increased trade with the PRC have sometimes favored improved military ties as a means to show American good faith toward China, to insure a fruitful economic relationship with the PRC, and to build China's sense of security. 27/

26/ Their concerns focus on China's irridentist claims and its potential role as a destabilizing force in the region--factors that are seen as possibly more difficult to deal with if the United States seems to defer more to China's interests in Asian affairs.

Stanford University Professor Harry Harding has urged that there be closer understanding between the United States and its allies in Asia on China policy before the United States begins to sell weapons or weapons-related technology to China. See his testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, September 25, 1980.

27/ These developments reportedly will increase the likelihood that the PRC will play a stabilizing rather than disruptive role in the economically important East Asian region. This view was voiced by some U.S. business persons with a special interest in East Asian affairs.

V. ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF U.S. MILITARY SALES TO CHINA

U.S. policy makers in the 97th Congress and the Reagan Administration may well allow their particular views on the U.S.-Soviet-Chinese relationship or their special interest in U.S. foreign policy, (e.g., Taiwan, trade with China, etc.) to influence their decisions on which of the contending schools of thought they will favor in regard to U.S. military transfers to China. But they are unlikely to do so without careful review of what specialists see as the main advantages and disadvantages of such U.S. moves. This section provides an analysis of the perceived pros and cons of this policy in order to assist policy makers and others in making up their mind. It is divided into two subsections, dealing respectively with strategic advantages and disadvantages and with political-economic advantages and disadvantages.

A. Strategic Considerations

1. Pro: Some of the strongest arguments in favor of increased U.S. military transfers to China center on the effect they are said to have on Chinese and Soviet strategic planning. U.S. military transfers to China, it is asserted, will further insure that China would remain on the American side against the USSR during the period of U.S. strategic vulnerability in the years ahead. The transfers would also serve to consolidate American ties with what is viewed as the emerging great power in Asia--China. A few military planners point out that the U.S. military moves will help pave the way to what they see as a desirable and necessary Sino-American mutual

security arrangement in Northeast Asia--an alliance system that they judge should also include Japan. 28/

The U.S. military supplies would increase China's sense of security vis-a-vis the Soviet Union and reduce the chance that the USSR would be able to intimidate or otherwise pressure China into a more pro-Soviet foreign policy stance. A greater Chinese sense of security is said to be necessary before the United States can expect the PRC to join in serious discussions on limiting nuclear arms development.

While the U.S. transfers are not seen as substantially altering China's ability to project power against the USSR, a number of analysts have said that such transfers could seriously complicate Soviet military plans in Asia. Moscow would not only have to devote more resources to countering whatever limited improvements are made in Chinese forces, but it would also have to worry more about conflict along its Asian front in the event of an East-West confrontation over Europe or the Middle East.

Some analysts worry about the Soviet Union redeploying westward forces in Asia in the event of a crisis with the West in Europe. They add that such redeployments would be less likely under circumstances of closer Sino-American military cooperation. Closer military cooperation with China could also give the United States the option of using facilities in China (air fields, ports, etc.) in the event of a major confrontation with the USSR,

28/ These analysts are predictably vague in defining the outlines of this proposed mutual security arrangement, although they repeatedly compare it directly with the North Atlantic alliance.

thereby placing Soviet central Asia and the Far East under greater pressure than at present.

Another strategic advantage seen by a few analysts relates to Japan. Noting U.S. frustration with the slowness of the Japanese defense development and the seeming inability of the United States effectively to pressure Japan on this issue for fear of alienating our most important ally in Asia, these observers stress that closer military ties with China could help in these areas. They could allow the United States more latitude in pressuring the Japanese to do more in defense against the USSR, as well as in other areas, and could increase to some degree Japan's sense of vulnerability. This feeling of vulnerability is described as the most important element in influencing Japan to give defense a higher priority.

2. Con: Opponents of U.S.-China military cooperation are not impressed by these supposed advantages and point to a variety of strategic disadvantages they see associated with U.S.-China military ties. For one thing, China's current nuclear strategic capability is potentially threatening to the United States, and U.S. aid to China's conventional forces could presumably allow the PRC to devote more attention to developing strategic weapons. China is said to be likely over the longer term to pose a threat to U.S. interests in Asia. As it gets stronger with U.S. support, China may well act more independently and assertively and come into conflict with some of its neighbors whose interests are close to

those of the United States. Taiwan is the most obvious area for such conflict. 29/

Closer military cooperation with China could lead to such negative consequences as even more Soviet military pressure on China 30/ or perhaps a punitive Soviet strike along the Chinese border. 31/ The Soviet counter-moves, if successful, could undercut the relatively pro-Western leadership of China and discredit those Chinese officials who have linked China's defensive strategy to close association with the United States. 32/

29/ For instance, it is claimed that U.S. military transfers to China might so increase China's perceived leverage over the United States in Asia that Peking might take more forceful actions--such as a naval blockade--against the island. U.S. arms are not thought to increase substantially the PRC ability to conduct such an operation, at least for several years. But the transfers could signal Peking, Taiwan and Taiwan's leading trading partners of a shift in U.S. priorities in the region, suggesting that the United States would not react strongly to such a PRC resort to force against the island. In the event of a PRC blockade--which is thought by many to be within the range of China's current military capabilities--the United States would have to decide whether to confront its strategically important friend in Asia or allow Taiwan to be pressured into an accommodation with the mainland.

30/ Some analysts would welcome an increase in Soviet deployments against China because they would reduce Soviet ability to confront the West elsewhere.

31/ While a few analysts see Moscow as possibly reacting immediately with force to U.S. sales to China, others stress that Soviet military planners have not been rash in their military actions against China. Several have added that the United States should be wary that even through Soviet planners may appear cautious, U.S. military cooperation could quickly build to a point where it would cross an ill-defined "threshold" of Soviet tolerance, leading to a harsh military response against China, and possibly, the United States.

32/ Some China specialists argue that China is unlikely to change its anti-Soviet posture and will continue to tie down Soviet forces, whether or not the United States increases military transfers to the PRC. They therefore see little need for the United States to risk the possible disadvantages of closer U.S.-China military ties.

The USSR could react to U.S. transfers of military supplies to China with countermeasures involving Vietnam or possibly India, perhaps including stepped up efforts to establish Soviet military installations in Southeast and South Asia. These moves not only would help the USSR to encircle China and curb Chinese influence in Asia, but they would also seriously challenge the ability of the United States to defend sea lines of communications in these important areas. U.S. moves toward military ties with China could seriously dampen Soviet interest in arms control with the United States and upset existing East-West understandings for these negotiations. In particular, Moscow would be more likely to demand compensation in any disarmament proposal due to Chinese nuclear forces--something the United States has rejected in the past.

B. Political-Economic Factors

1. Pro: Perhaps the strongest political argument for going ahead with limited military transfers to China is that U.S. leaders have apparently already given Chinese officials the impression that they would do so. To reverse course at this stage could lead to serious complications in Sino-American relations. The transfers would show American "good faith," build support for and establish American influence with the relatively pragmatic leaders currently governing China, and promote important channels of communications with segments of the Chinese military leadership who might otherwise

remain skeptical of China's recent tilt toward the United States. 33/ It is asserted that preparing such a solid foundation for Sino-American ties is essential in order to permit the relationship to withstand future difficulties over such issues as Taiwan, 34/ U.S.-Soviet arms control and human rights.

Military transfers to China are also said to provide the United States with a "China card" useful in promoting more positive Soviet behavior toward the United States or in compensating the United States for Soviet gains made elsewhere in the Third World. They reportedly have indirect advantages for U.S. trade with China, as China is said to be likely to give business people associated with its major military backer more advantageous treatment than their competitors from other countries. 35/ Closer military ties with China could reduce U.S. dependency

33/ It has been noted by some that Chinese military leaders have received less benefit than other PRC leaders from China's modernization program or its opening to the West; they therefore would have less to lose, and possibly more to gain, if that program and China's pragmatic, relatively pro-Western leadership under Deng Xiaoping were changed. American concern over the loyalty of China's military to the current Deng Xiaoping leadership in Peking was increased in late 1980 by press reports that Deng's opponents were trying to appeal to the military in order to undercut Deng's programs and to save their own leadership positions.

34/ It is said that the United States cannot expect relations with China to remain cordial if it continues--as expected--to sell hundreds of millions of dollars worth of military equipment to Taiwan while maintaining a de facto arms embargo against the PRC. In particular, some say that the United States could avoid a downturn in U.S.-China relations and still go ahead with the proposed sale of the FX fighter aircraft to Taiwan by simultaneously allowing the transfer to China of sophisticated U.S. aircraft engine technology needed for the PRC fighter aircraft program.

35/ One China specialist went further in this regard, asserting that China gives better treatment and more advantageous trade to those individual American companies which have been most helpful in promoting U.S. military transfers to China.

on Japan and increase U.S. leverage over the Japanese on a variety of issues, including U.S.-Japanese trade disagreements. 36/

2. Con: Opponents of military transfers raise a host of possible political and economic disadvantages to such ties. They could lock the United States into an anti-Soviet posture in international affairs at a time when the United States may have more to gain from cooperation than confrontation with the USSR. This could happen even if the United States wanted only a limited military relationship with the PRC, because such relationships, once started, develop rapidly and prove difficult to stop.

The transfers could link the United States closely with the Chinese side of the Sino-Soviet dispute in Asia, notably reducing prospects for more independent U.S. policies vis-a-vis Vietnam or India. They could promote a view that the United States perceived China, rather than Japan, as its main ally in Asia, thereby leading to an erosion of the U.S.- Japan Alliance. They could signal a loss of U.S. influence in Asia, 37/ as well as a loss in influence over China's future behavior. The latter would be even more likely if the United States agreed to coproduction-type arrangements with China that would allow the Chinese to have full control

36/ A few observers have claimed that Japan's leaders have been privately arguing against U.S. arms sales to China in part for selfish reasons. The Japanese allegedly judge that if the United States moves ahead with such sales, China will favor U.S. businessmen over Japanese businessmen on potentially lucrative trade deals.

37/ One Asian specialist said that some of the ASEAN countries, in response to U.S.-China military ties, would begin to reassess their view of the Soviet presence in Southeast Asia and might come to see the USSR and its ally, Vietnam, as a useful buffer to growing Chinese power in the region. Several other analysts expressed doubt that the transfer of arms to China would automatically result in such a shift of ASEAN attitude.

over the use of weapons produced with technology supplied by the United States. 38/

In view of China's history of political instability, it is quite possible that a new leadership less favorable to the United States could emerge in China over the next few years. The example of Soviet military cooperation with China in the 1950s is also not reassuring, as it seemed to prompt unrealistic Chinese expectations which the USSR was unwilling to fulfill. This led to a serious downturn in relations--a pattern which could be followed in Sino-American relations during the 1980's if the China army leaders and other Chinese officials come to rely too heavily on American supplies and support. 39/

38/ Even some analysts who favor arms transfers to China argue that such sales should be seen only as a supplement to, not a substitute for, U.S. power in the region. Otherwise, they warn, the United States would become too dependent on China to protect U.S. interests in the region. However, others favoring Sino-American security ties judge that it is unrealistic to expect the United States not to use China as a substitute for U.S. power in East Asia to some degree. They emphasize that the United States needs to consolidate its forces in order to deal with the USSR in other important areas, notably the Persian Gulf, and that it should use China as a strategic bulwark in East Asia. Some note that the United States in effect has already started this kind of approach in Southeast Asia, where China--and not the United States--is seen as the main strategic guarantor of American interests in Thailand against military pressure from Soviet-backed Vietnam.

Meanwhile, several observers have pointed out that many of the disadvantages of U.S. arms sales to China could be overcome if West Europeans--not Americans--sold arms to China. But others have added that these countries frequently have shown themselves to be very sensitive to Soviet pressure not to sell arms to the PRC--pressure that would presumably have less effect on the United States.

39/ Some analysts claim that Chinese leaders lack a fixed and viable defense strategy and that U.S. military supplies could prove to be less than fully useful if Chinese defense plans changed in the future. Chinese leaders might then be inclined to blame the United States for transferring "inappropriate" equipment at great cost to China's limited economic resources.

China is also seen as gaining much more than it gives in its new relationship with the United States. Some stress the contrast between the risks the United States would take in increasing military ties with China and the fact that the Americans would still have no guarantee that China would be any more likely to side with the United States on issues important to American interests vis-a-vis the Soviet Union or elsewhere.

VI. PROSPECTS AND OPTIONS

Members of the 97th Congress and the Reagan Administration will be buffeted by cross currents of political opinion as they attempt to deal with the issue of increased U.S. military supplies to China in the months ahead. Recent trends in U.S.-Soviet-Chinese relations seem to favor those Americans who wish to transfer more military equipment and arms to China. Support for such sales is likely to build so long as U.S. relations with the Soviet Union remain characterized more by hostility than by cooperation, U.S. relations with China continue along their rapid evolution toward closer friendship, and Sino-Soviet relations remain stalemated.

The Chinese, for their part, appear likely to continue to press the United States for more advanced military equipment and technology. A flat U.S. refusal to sell such material to China would almost certainly prompt expressions of strong disappointment by Chinese leaders, who would see it as a clear sign of America's lack of trust of China and U.S. determination to maintain an "arms embargo" against the PRC. When taken together with the Reagan Administration's well known differences with Peking over U.S.-Taiwan relations, the refusal could lead to a serious downturn in Sino-American relations.

The main worry about the military transfers concerns their symbolic importance, especially their implications for future U.S. policy toward China and their meaning for American relations with the USSR, Japan, and

other Asian states. Here lies what many currently see as the greatest challenge to American policy makers in dealing with China.

The incrementally developing American security relationship with China over the past decade has from time to time led to misperceptions of U.S. intentions on the part of American interest groups, the Soviet Union, Asian countries and even the Chinese leaders. If U.S. leaders maintain a vagueness about China's place in American security policy while moving ahead with more military transfers to China, various interested parties could make too extreme an interpretation of U.S. objectives; their reactions could well be contrary to American interests. Thus, Chinese leaders might incorrectly see such transfers as signaling a major strengthening of what they may view as America's commitment to protect China's security against the USSR. Soviet leaders might perceive them as the consummation of a defacto U.S.-China military alliance that must be actively resisted by the USSR. Japan and other U.S. allies and friends in Asia could see them as signaling a fundamental shift in American interest in Asia, away from them and toward the PRC as the main backer of American security interests in the region.

By contrast, a different approach, which would allow the United States to make clearer to the various interested parties the limited objectives of its China policy, could reduce possible adverse consequences for U.S. interests. Under these circumstances, the United States would agree to increase to a carefully limited degree U.S. military transfers to China, including some defensive weapons or related technology. It would use the opportunity to serve notice to Peking that the Chinese leaders should expect

no more such military help until Sino-American relations have matured over several more years. This policy would remain in effect barring a gross change in the international balance of power or a substantial increase in Soviet military power in Asia designed to pressure China into a less pro-American posture. The United States could continue to solidify its ties with China in economic and political areas which are seen as having little negative consequence for U.S. interests.

It would be particularly important to clarify the limits of Sino-American military cooperation to the leaders of the Soviet Union. It could be noted in conversations with the Soviets that U.S. supplies to China are in part governed by a desire to maintain, but not to narrow substantially, the current gap in the military capabilities of Sino-Soviet forces along China's northern border. Thus, Moscow would know that any major Soviet effort to expand its military power in Asia in order to intimidate China would likely prompt increased U.S. support for China's military modernization.

Japan and other Asian states would also have to be reassured. A solid consensus in the United States in support of the limited military relationship with China would appear to be required. Such a consensus might prove difficult to build, and yet remain within the confines of the limited military relationship noted above. In particular, some in the Congress may be inclined to ask for a "quid pro quo" for U.S. military help to China. While this could involve preferential treatment of U.S. business representatives in trade with China, some U.S. representatives might demand that the United States be compensated with increased military access to

China, such as with basing rights or intelligence gathering facilities. Of course, such a move would be more likely to increase the risks of Soviet and other foreign reactions contrary to U.S. interests.

Another option is to use limited military transfers as the first in a series of steps leading to some sort of mutual security arrangement with China against the USSR. These steps could include U.S. training of Chinese military personnel, the stationing of American military experts in China, the presence of U.S. intelligence facilities in China, Sino-American maneuvers and exercises, and U.S. planning with Chinese forces. While such an approach would clearly have at least a short term positive impact on U.S.-China relations, it would make almost impossible any lasting U.S. reassurance of the Soviet Union and other interested Asian nations over American intentions toward China. Should U.S. planners pursue this option, they probably should continue an ambiguous and secretive policy in regard to U.S.-China security ties. As noted above, such a policy carries the risk of prompting extreme international reactions -- reactions which could seriously complicate American interests both at home and abroad.

In short, U.S. refusal to sell any weapons or related technology to China could seriously affect Sino-American relations and, by extension, a variety of important U.S. interests in world affairs. But the risks of moving ahead with such sales--whether or not they are designed to foster a close Sino-American mutual security arrangement against the Soviet Union--will remain great so long as U.S. leaders remain vague about the objectives of their strategic relationship with China. The risks of a carefully limited U.S. military transfer to China could be reduced substantially if U.S. leaders shifted to a more clearly defined policy of

moderate U.S. objectives toward China that could assure friends and foes alike of American intentions toward the PRC.

VII. APPENDIX

I. China's Defense Strategy and Force Posture

The Chinese base their national defense strategy on deterring an attack by making it too costly for a potential enemy. They have implemented this strategy by building a modest but credible nuclear force and large conventional armed forces capable of fighting a protracted war. 40/

A. Strategic Programs

China's nuclear deterrent consists of manned bombers and a small but growing ballistic missile force. The light and medium bomber units are not seen as trained and organized as a nuclear strike force, but they could deliver nuclear bombs on targets close to the borders.

The missile force consists of a few dozen CSS1 MRBMs and CSS2 IRBMs deployed in a semimobile or other mode to enhance their survivability. A few CSS3 ICBMs are also in use. These missiles could reach Moscow. In addition, China has made progress in developing a truly intercontinental ballistic missile system that will enable

40/ Publications giving detailed information on Chinese and Soviet force deployments are noted in the selected readings section at the end of this study. Figures used here are taken from The Military Balance, 1980-1981, Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1980. Among books and articles of particular use, see John M. Collins, U.S.-Soviet Military Balance, 1960-1980; Peter Young, "China's Military Capabilities," Asian Defense Journal, February, 1979; U.S. Congress. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "Sino-American Relations: A New Turn"; and Angus Fraser, "Military Modernization in China," Problems of Communism, September-December, 1979.

the PRC to deliver nuclear warheads on targets almost anywhere in the world, including the continental United States. The CSS4 ICBM has been tested successfully and may become operational in the near future.

China is also developing a network of radars to provide all-around early warning of ballistic missile attack. And it has pursued a space program which has placed a high priority on developing satellites for intelligence collection purposes.

B. General Purpose Forces

The Chinese have one of the largest conventional armed forces in the world--over 4 million men. They do not pose a direct military threat to the United States, but they could attack U.S. bases and U.S. allies in the Far East. Peking considers the Soviet Union to be its most dangerous potential adversary. About half of the armed forces are arrayed in a defensive posture to meet the Soviet threat. Another third of the forces are located along the coast and near Vietnam, where Peking continues to perceive a threat. Most of the remainder are located in central China as a reserve; only a few units are in western China and Tibet.

1. Employment for Attack

Without the intervention of the United States or USSR, China could overwhelm its smaller neighbors. Against the Soviet Union, Taiwan or India, however, its conventional military forces would be hampered by inadequacies in firepower, mobility and logistics, as well as by geographical and topographical factors.

The vast distances involved and the quality of Soviet forces along the border would allow the Chinese to make at best only shallow incursions into the USSR. The Taiwan Strait is still an effective barrier against a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. The difficult terrain of Tibet and capable Indian defenses would limit any attack against India. Indian troops would be defending their own territory over lines of communication much shorter than the Chinese; if the Indians were determined, the Chinese would not be able to mount and sustain an offensive through Tibet with a force large enough to defeat them.

2. Employment for Defense

To counter an invader with superior firepower and mobility, the Chinese would employ distance and terrain. They do not appear to intend to give up territory easily, but to wear down the attackers as they try to drive through successive lines of increasingly stronger forces. The Chinese continue to emphasize dispersal, redundancy and other passive defense measures to improve the survivability of military industries and certain elements of the armed forces.

The sheer size of China's standing armed forces compensates to some degree for their inadequacies. Moreover, the vast mobilization potential would provide considerable resources during a prolonged war. China has between 5-10 million lightly armed men organized in paramilitary organizations. They could be used primarily to wage guerrilla warfare, support regular forces, and maintain internal security. They could not be turned into regular forces quickly; China does not have enough heavy weapons and could not turn them out rapidly in the number that would be needed.

3. Ground Forces

China's regular army consists of approximately 3.5 million men organized into main and regional forces. Main forces consist of about 130 combat divisions, mostly infantry, and 40 combat support divisions. The combat divisions are the best equipped and most mobile of the ground forces. They have most of the estimated 10,000 tanks in China's inventory, and both their tank and artillery elements are gradually being upgraded. Their primary missions are to halt enemy penetrations and to launch counterattacks or offensives.

The regional forces, with over 80 divisions, are organized, armed and trained for defense of specific areas. Some of the regional divisions man elaborate fixed defenses, which have been established on the major avenues of approach.

Most of the ground force equipment produced by China's new industry is based on older Soviet designs. Though unsophisticated by U.S. or Soviet standards, the small arms, tanks, and artillery are rugged, reliable and generally adequate for their intended use. China annually produces several hundred type-59 medium tanks (copies of the Soviet T-54) and a small number of Chinese-designed armored personnel carriers and light tanks. The field artillery inventory of 16,000 weapons includes guns with calibers of up to 130 mm, howitzers of up to 152 mm, and a growing number of multiple rocket launchers.

The Chinese produce a wide variety of rudimentary protective equipment for chemical and biological defenses, and they emphasize its use in training. They have the industrial base and technical competence to produce chemical warfare agents, but it is not known

if they have stockpiled large amounts. There is no evidence indicating that China has an offensive biological warfare capability.

The ground forces are seen as requiring major improvement in several areas including antiarmor weapons, particularly antitank guided missiles; tactical air defense weapons, including mobile missiles and radar-directed, rapid-fire guns; and general transport for equipment and troops.

4. Air Force

China's Air Force has around 6,000 combat aircraft. It is severely limited, however, by a lack of modern planes and sophisticated weapons. It is primarily a defensive forces, and its aircraft are based on Soviet technology. Only a very small percentage of the roughly 4,500 air defense fighters are MIG-21s; the remainder are MIG-19s or older models.

The air force has about 1,000 tactical bombers; some 400 are Chinese-designed F-9 fighter bombers, and another 450 are IL-28 light bombers of Soviet design. All have relatively short ranges and small bomb loads (in comparison with U.S. aircraft and late-model Soviet planes). China's 90 TU-16s can be used in a strategic role, but they are not known to have air-to-surface missiles and electronic countermeasure equipment and are highly vulnerable to modern interceptors and surface-to-air missiles. Few Chinese combat aircraft have the gear required for combat during adverse weather.

China manufactures MIG-19s, MIG-21s, IL-28s, F-9s and TU-16s. It has produced over half of the MIG-21s in its inventory, but manufacturing problems, particularly with the engines, have caused the MIG-21 program to proceed haltingly. In late 1975 China brought Spey jet engines and technology from Britain. These presumably will improve China's aeronautical industry,

by the middle of the 1980s, but until then the Air Force must rely on the technology and production it now has. The Spey engine is not suitable for use in the MIG-21 as it is currently configured.

5. Air Defense

The ground-based air defenses consist of thousands of antiaircraft guns and several hundred surface-to-air missile launchers (the CSA-1, a version of the Soviet SA-2). These defenses are thought to be deployed primarily around urban and industrial centers and critical military facilities.

China's air surveillance network provides some early warning coverage at medium and high altitudes but has many gaps at low altitudes. The command and control system is inefficient, and its personnel lack experience in operating in an electronic countermeasure environment. The country is highly vulnerable to low-level penetration by a large force of modern aircraft, especially during adverse weather. By virtue of their numbers, however, the Chinese fighters (in combination with ground-based air defenses) could inflict significant casualties (given time and good weather) on enemy aircraft flying at low to medium altitude.

6. Navy

Already an effective coastal defense force, the 350,000-man Navy is beginning a transition to a deep-water force. It is organized into the North Sea, East Sea and South Sea Fleets. Each has both surface ships and submarines assigned to it.

The Navy has more than 2,000 vessels, including hundreds of coastal patrol craft, a number of amphibious ships and landing craft, over 200

missile boats and several hundred auxiliaries. The Navy has only 38 major surface warships, the largest of which are destroyers. Most of these surface ships are armed with Styx (Soviet) antiship cruise missiles, but they depend on their guns for antiaircraft protection.

Of the Navy's 99 operational submarines, all but two are diesel-powered torpedo attack submarines. One is an old G-class submarine, apparently modified into a test platform for China's SLBM. The other one is a Han-class nuclear-powered attack submarine that was launched in 1970. A second Han-class submarine is now said to be undergoing sea trials.

Over the last several years, naval shipbuilding and maritime operations have demonstrated Peking's intention to project the Navy's presence beyond coastal waters. In addition to building missile boats and submarines for coastal defense, the Chinese have expanded the construction of large surface warships, including destroyers (the Luta class) and frigates (the Kiang-hu class). They also are working on naval support ships for distant operations. In the past few years Chinese oceanographic research ships have conducted long-range cruises to the southwest Pacific, collecting technical data needed to operate in the open ocean.

Chinese naval ships are seen as having major shortcomings in antisubmarine warfare and air defense. Their obsolescent ASW detection equipment and weapons system are reasonably effective in shallow coastal waters but unsatisfactory in the open ocean. For air defense, the ships must depend on their guns, unless they are within range of shore-based planes.

C. Modernization

China is well aware of its military shortcomings and since about 1975 has renewed its efforts to improve and modernize its armed forces. The long-term program places emphasis both on improving the quality and combat skills of troops and on acquiring modern arms. The Chinese cannot develop sophisticated weapons quickly, and they almost certainly foresee a gradual weakening relative to the Soviets unless they begin arming their forces with modern weapons. Therefore, the Chinese are interested in buying advanced conventional weapons and related technology from the West. They cannot afford to buy everything they need, however, and have adopted an apparent strategy of buying limited quantities of modern equipment outright, and in addition acquiring the technology and licensing rights to produce and develop them domestically.

The Chinese seem most eager to procure such equipment as anti-tank missiles, anti-aircraft missiles, aircraft, anti-ship missiles, anti-submarine warfare equipment and diesel marine engines, but few deals are known to have been completed. Purchases of Western military equipment are unlikely to have any major impact on China's force capabilities soon. China would need many years to field modern weapons in large numbers, to establish a support structure to sustain them, and to train personnel in their operation. Because most of the weapons they are seeking are unlike any they now have, the Chinese would need to make major changes in their force structure before they could effectively integrate the weapons into operational units.

Units stationed along the Sino-Soviet border would likely get the new weapons first. Modern weapons would enhance their effectiveness;

but no single conventional weapon system would significantly change the current military situation on the Sino-Soviet border.

II. The Sino-Soviet Military Balance

China has identified the Soviet Union as its most dangerous potential adversary. Both countries maintain a substantial portion of their forces along the border; both keep their forces in an essentially defensive posture; and a conventional war would be risky and costly for both.

Chinese conventional forces could make only shallow incursions into Soviet territory. Soviet forces and strong fixed defenses are capable of halting an invasion. Soviet troops invading China would meet forces that are organized, equipped and deployed for a nonnuclear defense. The Chinese are seen as having a reasonable chance of stalemating a Soviet conventional attack before it reached the North China plain.

Should hostilities escalate to the use of nuclear weapons, China would be no match for the USSR. Nonetheless, if they could launch their nuclear forces, the Chinese could devastate the Soviets' urban support bases in the Far East and make it difficult for surviving Soviet military forces to sustain operations.

A. Ground Forces

The Chinese have positioned about 1.5 million men in the four military regions adjacent to the border. Most of the troops are infantry--around

100 divisions; the tank divisions in the area number nine. Virtually all the combat units are fully manned and equipped. Most of them are located near the first defensible terrain well back from the border.

The USSR maintains over 400,000 men (about a quarter of the Soviet ground forces) in the border districts and in Mongolia. Most of the 40-odd divisions are motorized rifle units with substantial amounts of armor; they have more than 10,000 tanks. Many of the Soviet divisions (unlike the Chinese) are under strength.

The Soviets could increase their combat forces to about 1 million men by fully mobilizing their resources in the Far East alone. They probably could not begin major offensive operations for at least a week, and full mobilization of the support structure would take longer.

B. Air Forces and Air Defense

The Chinese enjoy an edge in the number of combat aircraft along the border but most Soviet aircraft are far superior to and better armed than those of China, and Soviet pilots receive more training. The Soviets also have armed helicopters that would provide fire support to ground force units, while the Chinese have nothing comparable.

Soviet ground force units have one of the most effective array of air defense weapons in the world. The number, diversity and sophistication of their air defense missiles and guns would inflict heavy losses on any Chinese air attack. Chinese ground forces must depend on a large number of fighter planes and towed antiaircraft guns for defense. Over time, Chinese fighters and ground-based air defenses could take a significant toll on enemy aircraft, but the Soviets still could establish local air superiority.

C. Sino-Soviet Border War

The threat of war between China and the USSR has diminished since the border clashes and Soviets hints of preemptive nuclear strike in 1969. Although a gradual Soviet military buildup in the Far East has been ongoing since the early 1960's, it apparently was not viewed in Peking as a serious threat or a significant alteration of the forces balance. Peking appeared content to continue the ideological war of words, not fearing that things might deteriorate into a military confrontation. They genuinely seemed to have been caught off guard when the border skirmishes escalated, and the threat of a major war with the Soviet Union loomed large. Once the seriousness of the threat was recognized, however, Peking moved quickly to ameliorate the situation and reduce tensions. The first step was to agree to face-to-face talks with the Soviets at the Peking airport in September 1969.

Almost immediately thereafter a reorientation of the PLA commenced greatly strengthening the northern border. These moves shifted the focus of the PLA's defenses from seaward approaches to the concept of all-around defense. In the process a large number of forces were repositioned, new units established, and the production of military weapons and equipment increased dramatically.

In 1971 Peking's perception of the imminence of hostilities appeared to have been sharply reduced, however. The frantic pace of developments of the earlier period was replaced by programs designed for the long haul--albeit in a new threat environment--and continued improvement on its military preparations. In a related development the beginnings of a new era in

Sino-United States relations dawned that eventually would lead to the dramatic breakthrough in 1972 at Shanghai.

The PLA is much better prepared to deal with a Soviet conventional attack today than it was in 1969, but would suffer from distinct disadvantages on a nuclear or chemical battlefield. In a conventional war the Chinese probably could stop a Soviet offensive before all of Manchuria was lost. On the other hand, a PLA counteroffensive to dislodge the USSR from Chinese territory probably would also fail. Such a stalemate leading to a war of attrition would favor the Chinese. Any Soviet attempt to occupy and pacify a hostile territory virtually the size of Western Europe would surely pose almost insurmountable difficulties and lead to a massive drain on Soviet manpower and resources.

The Soviet posture along the border suggests that there are many similarities between contingency planning for war in Europe and the Far East. That is, a first campaign--lasting approximately 60 days--would concentrate on rapidly overrunning the northern half of Manchuria while a lesser force marched into China's northwestern province, Sinkiang. Forces pushing south from Manchuria would link up with a force from Mongolia speeding toward Peking in a second 60-day campaign capturing all of North China in a strategic pincers movement.

To blunt such a Soviet offensive, the PLA has countered with a defense in depth. Along major avenues of approach on the first defensible terrain, local force units would likely engage in positional or trench warfare. Once these obstacles were overcome, Soviet forces would

encounter ever increasing numbers of China's best main force divisions. Although the Soviets probably would overrun the divisions they met on the Manchurian plain, the bulk of the PLA would remain uncommitted in terrain move favorable to the less mobile Chinese units in southern Manchuria. It is necessary to dislodge these units before the necessary linkup of forces is achieved in the all important second campaign. Moreover, the time elapsed would give the Chinese time to draw down forces from other areas and move them to staging and reserve positions farther north.

The outcome of the air war in such a conflict is of course a crucial variable. In an all out contest for air superiority, the Soviets sophisticated aircraft and comparatively better trained pilots would offset China's numerical advantage. Peking appears to realize this, and thus, if possible, would avoid confronting directly Soviet airpower. Instead, the Chinese apparently plan to husband their resources as long as possible and attack only when they believe the odds are favorable or when dictated by a requirement to support ground operations. The Chinese cannot expect great success with such tactics, but they may believe that a number of small local victories will give the ground forces just enough air support to sustain combat until the Soviet offensive is stalled.

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